

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL
TERRY R. FERRELL, COMMANDER, SECOND BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM,
THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION, MULTINATIONAL DIVISION-CENTER, VIA
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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Okay, well,
we got -- looks like we got everybody online, so now we can get started officially.

Colonel Terry Ferrell, commander of Second Brigade Combat Team, Third Infantry
Division, Multinational Division-Center in Iraq, welcome to the bloggers roundtable this
morning, sir. We're glad you could join us. Do you have an opening statement for us?

COL. FERRELL: Yes, I do.

And first and foremost, thank you for taking your time to talk to me today. I know
it's early back there, and I look forward to the discussion. Brief opening statement just to
highlight that the Second Brigade, Third Infantry Division, we were the last surge
brigade. We have just basically successfully completed five months of combat
operations in the Arab Jabour region, southeast of Baghdad, which was a wealthy Sunni,
Ba'athist stronghold.

Just yesterday we completed operations as the division's decisive effort for a
division-level Operation Marne Torch II. The focus of that operation, of course, was to
block accelerants into Baghdad, protect the population and defeat sectarian violence.
Through a full spectrum of operations, we were able to utilize Iraqi security forces and
the assistance of concerned citizen groups to seek out and kill/capture al Qaeda that
operates in our area of operations; to further advance our positioning within the Arab
Jabour region; and to actually get to blocking of the accelerants into Baghdad.

Understanding that now, as of the completion of Marne Torch II, we transition back
into additional operations, we've maintained the focus on security, but we look to other
areas that we need to apply additional emphasis on, from the governance, the economic

side of the house, and of course working with the locals to make sure that we've got a good communications package out there so they understand where we are and what we're doing.

I'd like to give you just some statistics from Operation Marne Torch II, since that's really where we're talking today. But at the completion of that, the vision -- operation under Major General Rick Lynch, Arab Jabour was a sanctuary when we first came in. And we initially conducted Operation Marne Torch I as we entered combat operations about five months ago. Follow on to that was Marne Torch II, and completion of Marne Torch II across the division, we successfully killed or captured about 250 personnel; identified, found 30 IEDs, over 40 caches; and destroyed about 12 boats that was being utilized to cross the Tigris. In addition to that, 1,900 personnel was entered into the biometric system and over 700 structures were cleared.

Specifically, I want to point out on the caches, out of the 32 that we found just in our battlespace, 17 were identified, found and brought forward, or we were taken to, by concerned citizens, which is a huge asset as we work through and talk about that. And additionally, as we were able to bring them on board and the information they provided, they were significant to the operation working along beside us, giving us information and the Iraqi security forces.

And with that, gentlemen, I'm more than prepared to take your questions today.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Andrew Lubin, you were first online, so why don't you get us started?

Q Great, thank you.

Colonel, Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ON Point.

Sir, from talking with Ken Adgie about 10 days, two weeks ago, your soldiers on the ground are doing a tremendous job, and the concerned citizens groups are springing up and matching you guys in effort and energy. What kind of response are you getting after that from the government of Iraq? Are they matching your efforts?

COL. FERRELL: We see a lot of progress, actually, with concerned citizens group(s) moving, as you well are aware of, talking with Ken and others, and you see it daily. We've got interest now -- just here in the coming weeks, in November, we're going to have a police recruiting process that goes. The government is assisting in that, of course. We've had visits by representatives of the government down into our area that is tied back to the concerned citizens, and a lot of assistance is starting to flow in to the various areas across the brigade's battlespace. So it's starting to take hold.

The big key, of course, was the area that we operate is very rural. And given that there was no structure of governance there when we first went in, there had to be an establishment of that at the local level for the GOI to actually reach in and talk to. That's

where the concerned citizens is really taking hold, I believe as Ken told you, and now there's leaders throughout our battlespace that can reach back and talk to the GOI. So it is making good progress.

Q Great, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Paul.

Q Hi, Colonel. It's Paul McLeary from Defense Technology International.

As far as the biometric program that you mentioned, I'm just curious if the -- you know, if that was there before you, if they left a database and if you're adding to this database, and if you can sync this database up with the one in Baghdad.

COL. FERRELL: Yes, we're able to go in and anyone who has been entered through the numerous rotations before us -- if the individual has been entered, he immediately comes up, so we're able to identify these folks as we put them back into the system. So yes, the database was there, and we're able to link the system across the span.

Q Okay. And how many people have you entered into the system in the past five months?

COL. FERRELL: Just in the last 30 days, during this operation, we entered over 1,900 people alone.

Q All right. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Bill.

Q Hello, Colonel Ferrell. It's Bill Roggio with The Long War Journal.

I was recently out there with -- embedded with Colonel Adgie's unit, the 130. There was a region south of the -- southeast of Patrol Base Hawkes where the 130 was hesitant to go into. Colonel Adgie felt that, you know, his forces were extended far enough. Have you been able to push further south into the pockets southeast in Arab Jabour, or is it sort of still a status quo down there? COL. FERRELL: No, that's a great question. Thank you.

First and foremost, part of Marne Torch II was the establishment of Patrol Base Hawkes. That gave the brigade the ability to expand our reach within the battlespace, allowing us to reach further to the south and southeast, and controlling more of the terrain with forces forward in the zone.

After the establishment of that -- and it's an ongoing process, but it's to the point now that we are conducting operations and have been for the last three weeks out of that location. It afforded us the opportunity to expand further to the southeast, and several of

the operations associated directly with Marne Torch II got after those locations that you're referring to, sir, further to the south/southeast that were potential safe havens that the al Qaeda or the insurgents had moved to as we made our initial entry into the Arab Jabour region. They moved further to the south/southeast, and we were able to go after them, and it resulted in several very lucrative objectives.

We were able to take 40-plus detainees in a couple of the operations and allowed more -- now, the key here: it also gave the citizens in those areas that we were able to go in and do the operations the confidence that they can come out and start to be a part of the concerned citizens in that area, and that movement now will continue to grow as well.

Q Just a real quick follow-up there. Yeah, he had mentioned that there was a group of people who wanted to form a concerned citizens. They were sort of waiting on us to help them. That has formed up? Do you have numbers for that, or is that still ongoing?

COL. FERRELL: The numbers are coming out as we speak. Actually, Colonel Adgie and his organization working the Arab Jabour, concerned citizens in that region, right now he's in a neighborhood of about 700 -- 665 to 700 on any given day, and daily -- just today when I was with him down in Abu Waitha, a portion of Arab Jabour as you probably are familiar with, more personnel were coming out.

It's the confidence that comes from the operations that we are doing. It's the confidence that comes from seeing the concerned citizens taking an active role that allows more to gather and join, and that's really the progress that you see if you were walking on the terrain.

Q Thank you very much, Colonel.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Griff.

Q Thanks, Colonel. It's Griff Jenkins from Fox News. I got two questions, one sort of a general one, and then one about the concerned citizens.

First, the general one. People ask me, you know, Griff, I see a Washington Post article that says "al Qaeda is dealt devastating blow," and then we have former generals -- retired generals coming out there saying it's all gone to hell in a handbasket, a nightmare, and such and such -- very, very different analysis. And I know you can only speak specific to your AO, but you have an important one because you have al Qaeda there. Could you comment or try and make heads or tails of the two visions that are -- or takes that are out there with respect to your area?

COL. FERRELL: Yes, I would. Specifically to respect to our area of operations, in the Arab Jabour region, al Qaeda has suffered a significant blow. Just in the last 30 days alone, we have either killed or captured three HVIs that was responsible for leading the operations within the region. We've taken 147 within the framework of Arab Jabour,

members from mid-level down to just foot soldiers per se, out of the region. So it has significantly reduced their capability forming the various direct- action cells from C-2 cells and the resupply capability, their support cells. So within our battlespace, we see that he has been significantly reduced.

That does not say that he doesn't have the ability to regenerate. We understand that. We all understand that. That's why we maintain the presence. That's why we continue the operations. That's why we stay in the fight every day. But I'm very proud to say that as we have taken the fight to them, as we have worked our area of operations, and as the citizens has come out and helped us and identified those al Qaeda members, which is a key here, point -- you know, actually identifying and pointing out who is al Qaeda, we have reduced in our area significantly.

Q Thanks. And that -- my follow up was specifically if you could just tell me, for folks who would -- you know, have not even heard that there was concerned citizens groups, how significant is their contribution in pursuing al Qaeda in your area? And what are the sacrifices that they're making to do this?

COL. FERRELL: Well, the real issue here with the concerned citizens, one, the majority of these people are just like you and I. They want to have a normal life. They want to be able to have their children go to school. They want to see their children grow up. They themselves want to be able to have a routine day, have a job, go to work, and not live in fear of losing their life because they have not succumbed to the rules and the strictness of al Qaeda. They understand, when they come forward in this type of environment, that they would become targets as well because if they are not members of al Qaeda, then they are singled out as turning on al Qaeda. So they become a target as well.

What they do for us, they identify as representatives who are the potential al Qaeda members in our area. They show us where caches are. They take us to caches. They turn in caches. They're significant in identifying where the IEDs are located, where the IEDs are being built in some cases. That protects our soldiers. That allows our soldiers to expand their reach and the security forces to expand their reach.

And it's a risk for them every day, but their risk that they take, they also understand that it increases their security. And it builds their confidence to come out more and more, and it grows daily.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right. Any follow-up questions?

Q Yes, I have one. Paul McLaren from Defense Technology International.

Concerning the IEDs, I believe you said you found 30 in the last 30 days?

COL. FERRELL: Yes, sir. That's what we found in our --

Q Go ahead.

COL. FERRELL: Go ahead.

Q No, I'm just curious what form they're taking, how large they are, where you're finding them, if there are any house-borne IEDs, things like that, triggering mechanisms.

COL. FERRELL: We have encountered a wide variety. We have found command-detonated. Of course, we have encountered several -- actually three house-borne IEDs that were identified by our soldiers before they entered. They could tell that they were wired. They were able to view that. Our soldiers successfully backed off, and we were able to reduce those threats to our soldiers and to the citizens that may have actually entered into those homes as they went back into the community themselves.

We see command wire. We see pressure plates. We see a large number of HME -- the homemade explosives, as you're well aware of -- because part of the caches -- and I tie this back to caches -- as we erode his resources, reducing the capabilities of what he has stockpiled in various locations throughout this previous sanctuary in Arab Jabour, that they've resulted to using HME. At one time we had a threat of deep-buried. That threat still exists throughout the proportions of our battlespace. But what we're actually experiencing now are more hastily laid along the road and on footpaths that soldiers would use, and concerned citizens. That's another point. The concerned citizens now are targeted just as well because they are a threat to al Qaeda.

Q Thanks so much.

Q Colonel, one quick question. How many concerned citizens do you have in your AO total? Do you know?

COL. FERRELL: Yes, I do. Today, at this very moment, we're operating across the battlespace for -- our brigade is about 782, would potentially go up to around a thousand, and that will continue to grow. We've got Arab Jabour. We're talking about Arab Jabour because some of you are familiar with that. But to the west of Arab Jabour is another what I think is decisive to our battlefield or our area of operations, and that's a town called Khor Zhev (ph). Khor Zhev (ph) has a concerned citizens movement that has started. It started back in August and it's slow, but now it's taken root and the citizens have come out. They're working in the neighborhood of 150 and it's growing every day, and they're actually come back and said they've got about 300 more that will join.

As we look further to the south and southwest in our area of operations, as we look to expand some of the aspects of how we do business, we see more that are willing to come out now. And that is a direct result, in my mind, to the successful operations of Marne Torch II that the division put together and was able to orchestrate across the width and depth of our battlespace. People know it's okay; they see what's being done by others.

And one other aspect about the concerned citizens. With the tribes, as the tribal organizations are structured, once they -- various tribes start to talk about this and they see members of the tribes are taking hold and really working this, then more and more start to come out. It's the security and the confidence that they will be safe or they will work as a member of an organization where the security will rise. That's how you gain your numbers.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q It's Griff. I've got one quick follow-up, if you could just clarify for me. With the concerned citizens group, I mean, you say you've got 700 to a thousand. Do you guys encourage them to become part of the Iraqi security forces, or are they on the path? Can you just explain that to me?

COL. FERRELL: Yes, I can explain it for you. The goal is for, as the concerned citizens program moves, working through with the GOI. The GOI has oversight. They're working forward programs now that evolves to where they may eventually become police officers or they can go into the Iraqi army. And there's other programs that the Iraqi government is starting to look at, how they can make everyone -- every individual who wants to be a concerned citizen may not meet the age and the physical demographics required to be a policeman, or may not meet the same requirements to be a soldier. So the government is looking at that.

As I stated earlier on, in November we have our first police recruiting drive. And out at Ken Adgie's area, out of his 600-plus that he's got, we've already got 200 -- I'd like to say the number is about 242 -- it could be higher today -- that have signed up and wants to go through the process to become police officers. So that's the path you take these folks on, and they take themselves.

And the governance piece, they start to structure their councils, the councils tie back into the provincial aspects, and it all ties and links back into the GOI. And that's where we see, as we help shape, they take the process. That's the whole goal here, is that they take hold from the grassroots up and they start to move it along.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Q Colonel, Andrew Lubin, ON Point.

Quick question, the accelerants you're blocking up into Baghdad, were they coming to your area or through your area? I've kind of heard they're more coming through than -- recently than from it.

COL. FERRELL: Predominantly, sir, they were coming through the area. You know, the Arab Jabour region, Khor Zhev (ph) area, it served as a great transit for -- into Baghdad, west of Baghdad, north of Baghdad, because you could run right up the Tigris, you could run up Highway 8. That's how we boundary our battlespace. But there's also - - as you look, there is some locations that they're making -- they were making HME, for example, and that's where we got to the point of stopping that as we continue to take the fight to it.

But predominantly, to answer your question succinctly, they were transiting through.

Q Okay. So they're Sunnis, then, or Shi'as?

MR. HOLT: Okay, Andrew, do you want to repeat that?

Q Yeah.

Colonel, were they probably Shi'as, then, or were they still Sunnis?

COL. FERRELL: I'm sorry; say that again, please?

Q Were they Sunnis or were they Shi'as, then, if they're transiting?

COL. FERRELL: Well, it's predominantly al Qaeda, so it's Sunni. What we see in our battlespace, when we work through here, it is al Qaeda, and it's been a safe haven. And the best way I can lay that out for you is the al Qaeda threat that we have that has been working back and forth here, it's a homegrown al Qaeda threat because our area of operations is 99.4 percent Sunni. So a lot of the leaders now and a lot of the actual al Qaeda members that started in our battlespace or may still be working in our battlespace, and that came through and brought others through, live here. Family members were here. So when I say transit, some had gone away and come back in and was moving resources through, and others just was here and wanted to move the resources through up into Baghdad or other areas.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Colonel Ferrell, we're just about out of time here. Have you got any closing comments for us?

COL. FERRELL: I would just like again to say thank you for taking your time today. I would like to tell you that the soldiers -- all services that are participating in the operation, they're in the fight every day. They're doing a fantastic job. The morale of the soldiers within the brigade combat team, the morale within the division, is the highest

that anyone could ever imagine. I've served with the unit before. I've served with the unit now for all of this deployment. And it's phenomenal what our young men and women are doing. They get out, they get after the fight every day, and you know, one minute they're engaging the enemy and the next minute they're working hand in hand to help the locals to better their lives. And it's phenomenal the young men and women we have in this country that serve our nation. MR. HOLT: Thank you very much.

Colonel Terry Ferrell, commander of the Second Brigade Combat Team, Third Infantry Division, Multinational Division-Center, thanks so much for joining us. And hopefully we can speak again here in a month or so and see how things are going.

Q Thanks, everyone.

COL. FERRELL: Okay, thank you all.

Q Thank you, Colonel. Best of luck.

END.